

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, December 14, 2012

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Wednesday (December 19): [Personnel-assignment updates](#) due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Commissioner issues statement on school shooting

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families whose children and loved ones were the victims of the tragic shooting this morning in Newtown, Connecticut. As educators, our very first priority is to ensure that our children are safe in school, and I want to assure Rhode Islanders that we have a number of protocols and practices in place to keep our schools safe and secure. While we do not have all the details about today's events, we will continue to monitor the events and if we can learn anything from analysis of this crime to make our schools even safer we will certainly do so. Tragedies such as the shooting today

make all of us think about the professionalism and dedication of those who work in our schools. Parents put their faith and trust in us as they place their children in our care every day, and we must always uphold that trust.

2. Commissioner plans school visits for 2013

During my State of Education Address earlier this year, I had the pleasure of recognizing several schools and districts from across the state that were leading the way in student achievement. The 12 schools and districts that I highlighted that evening enjoyed the opportunity to share with visitors to the State House some of the great work going on in their schools. Though I invited only a representative group, I know that there is great work happening in schools all over the state – far more than we could spotlight during that one event.

During the next few months, I am planning to visit some schools that are doing great things, particularly those schools that I have not yet had the opportunity to visit. During my visits, I would like to sit down with teachers and school leaders to hear what is working well, what challenges they are experiencing, and how we at RIDE can support you and your team as we work together to accelerate all schools toward greatness. Kim Bright, from my office, will reach out to you to schedule these visits.

3. Commissioner meets with union leaders to discuss evaluations

Ensuring that we have great teachers in every classroom and that teachers have the support and resources they need to do their job well remains our highest priority as we work together to transform education. I firmly believe that a high-quality evaluation

system is essential to this work, as evaluations will provide all educators with feedback and insight from fellow professionals that will help to continuously improve their knowledge and skills.

As you may be aware, a petition drive and an e-mail campaign are under way to persuade us at RIDE to “slow down” the evaluation process, particularly by delaying implementation of the Student Learning Objectives. I have met with leaders of both statewide labor unions, the National Education Association – Rhode Island (NEA-RI) and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) to hear their concerns and to discuss the evaluation process. We are currently in our year of full implementation of evaluations, and I know that we have definitely asked a lot of teachers, principals, and leaders at the district level from across the state. We have invested a lot of time and resources in our evaluation system, and we are fortunate to have received funds through Race to the Top that have enabled us to develop an excellent evaluation model.

Last year, we agreed to delay full implementation of evaluations and opted instead for a year of “gradual implementation” during the 2011-12 school year. We do not intend to delay full implementation again. We do, however, intend to continue careful monitoring of the evaluation process throughout this year of full implementation, and we will continue to listen to teachers and school leaders as we work together to determine our best next steps. I have reached out to both Frank Flynn (RIFTHP) and Larry Purtill (NEA-RI) to schedule further meetings to discuss the concerns their members have expressed regarding evaluations. I am confident that we can work together to ensure that our educator evaluations are fair, accurate, and focused on improving teaching and learning in Rhode Island.

From RIDE

Webinars and training

4. RIDE seeks aspiring turnaround-school leaders for Academy for Transformative Leadership

As part of the RIDE Academy for Transformative Leadership, a statewide initiative, funded through Race to the Top, that will train and support leaders as they work to transform our lowest-achieving schools, we are working with the NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA) to recruit, select, and train educators through the Aspiring Turnaround Leaders Program. We are seeking eight educators to participate in a year-long intensive program, including a full-time, compensated, school-based residency that will prepare the educators to become principals in fall 2014 in schools that we have identified as low-achieving. The program will begin with a three-week intensive training in July, prior to residency placement.

Applications are due on or before **March 29, 2013**. Access the application and additional information [here](#), through webinars.

Advance registration for the webinars is required.

You can register for a session by clicking on one of the dates below:

[Thu, Jan 17, 2013 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM EST](#)

[Mon, Jan 28, 2013 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM EST](#)

[Thu, Feb 7, 2013 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM EST](#)

[Wed, Feb 20, 2013 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM EST](#)

[Tue, Mar 5, 2013 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM EST](#)

[Wed, Mar 13, 2013 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM EDT](#)

Once registered, you will receive an e-mail confirming your registration along with the information you will need to join the webinar.

Certification

5. Educators may begin renewing certifications next month using new eCert! system

Our Office of Educator Quality and Certification is currently preparing to launch a new certification system. This new system – eCert! – will be available next month (January 2013). eCert! is a secure, user-friendly system that all educators will access through the statewide systems portal called RIDEMap. There are two important changes to note:

RIDE will no longer mail paper copies of certificates. Educators can access and print their certificates in PDF format by using the eCert system. Educators will no longer need to pay for a duplicate certificate.

Beginning March 1, we will no longer accept personal checks. We will accept credit cards with an on-line application. Money orders or bank checks will be accepted with mail-in and in-person applications.

Educators who hold certificates that expire on August 31, 2013, may renew certificates beginning next month. It is not necessary to wait until August to apply for renewal.

Please note: Applications for renewal must be received in our Certification Office no later than August 31, 2013, if the certificate is expiring. After August 31, any certificates that have expired must be reinstated, which requires meeting any regulations that have changed since the last renewal of the certification, including passing all certification tests. Therefore, all certified educators should check the expiration date of their certificate(s).

Evaluations

6. RIDE, support-professionals work group developing evaluation model for Support Professionals

The Rhode Island Model Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System is currently in development and scheduled to be gradually implemented statewide during the next school year, in preparation for full implementation during the 2014-15 school year. As part of the design process, RIDE has been convening a support professionals' work group made up of eight support professionals from across the state, including a reading specialist, school counselor, school psychologist, social worker, school nurse-teacher, speech-and-language pathologist, library-media specialist, and reading specialist. The support professionals work group meets bi-monthly and is charged with providing input and feedback on the design of the model.

One of the unique aspects being considered for the Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System is the use of Student Outcome Objectives. A Student Outcome Objective is a long-term goal set by a support professional that is focused on an outcome that increases access to learning.

To help prepare schools and districts to begin gradually implementing the new Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System in the next school year, RIDE will provide on-going training and professional-development opportunities. We understand the capacity demands on educators, especially principals, and we are working to develop a thoughtful training and support plan that is both high-quality and flexible.

A brief PowerPoint that outlines the implementation timeline and major criteria of the Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System can be found on our website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/EdEvalAnnounce.aspx>.

Technology

7. RIDE preparing list of vendors that LEAs may choose to conduct site surveys for Wireless Classroom Initiative

We have made progress on our Wireless Classroom Initiative. We are in the process of evaluating responses to the Letter of Interest seeking a Project Manager to oversee the initiative. Members of the evaluation team include LEA representatives from the Wireless Bond Advisory Group, RIDE staff, and the State Chief of Digital Excellence. We expect to make a recommendation soon on the selection of a Project Manager.

The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) that will establish a list of qualified vendors for LEA use (Master Price Agreement) has been posted on the State Purchasing website, at:

<https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RIVIP/StateAgencyBids/7458347.pdf>

The response deadline for to the RFQ is January 7. LEAs will contact a minimum of three vendors from this State Master Price Agreement, or more if required by local purchasing policies, to request a no-cost site survey. Completed site surveys will be forwarded by the vendor to RIDE for review by your technology director and RIDE.

Upon your selection of a vendor, and confirmation by RIDE, you will contract with the vendor and RIDE will begin the distribution of grants to fund the work. Only costs related to wireless infrastructure will be reimbursable.

Below is a tentative schedule for this work:

January 2013	Master Price Agreement established.
September 2013	Last day for LEAs to contact vendors and schedule survey; vendors must complete all site-survey work within 30 days of the start of the survey.
January 2014	All site surveys must be completed.
January 2015	All site work expected to be completed.

Please note that we will provide information in the future concerning a separate process for infrastructure upgrades (related to networks) for those LEAs that have already invested in wireless classrooms.

Relating to the RFQ, RIDE has posted an FCC Form 470 on the USAC website - <http://www.usac.org/sl/> - for LEAs with schools designated by USAC as Priority 2. LEAs will be able to use this MPA for related Priority 2 Internal Connection Services.

As a reminder, today is the last day for LEAs to submit their updates to the survey data collected last spring. We will continue to update you on the status of the Wireless Classroom Initiative as it progresses through each stage. If you have any questions concerning this initiative, please contact Cindy Brown, at 222-4257 or Cynthia.Brown@ride.ri.gov.

Data Collection

8. Personnel Data Collection to launch January 17; Personnel Assignment Process updates due Wednesday

The Personnel Data Collection (PDC) will be launched on January 17. Our Office of Educator Quality and Certification has shared this information with all human-resources contacts through the human-resources listserv. At this time, we are requesting LEAs to please complete your Personnel Assignment Process (PAP) updates by **Wednesday** (December 19) insofar as possible to help us ensure the most accurate data transfer from PAP to PDC. PAP data do not need to be submitted, only updated. For more information about the PDC, see:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/DOCS/ecert/PDCLaunch.pdf>

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.a
spx](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx)